



Wisconsin State Legislature

FOR MORE INFORMATION
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Audit Committee Approves King Audit

The Joint Legislative Audit Committee unanimously approved my request for an audit of King Veterans Home on September 21st. I requested the audit because I am concerned about the care that members, or residents, of the facility are receiving at King. Our veterans deserve the best possible care and it is our duty to make sure their quality of life at this facility is the best it can be. An audit by the non-partisan Legislative Audit Bureau is one of the best tools the legislature has to make sure state agencies and programs are operating effectively and efficiently.

Over the last month, I have heard from far too many King members and staff who have expressed serious concerns about this facility. Many of these people told me that the reason they did not come forward with this information, before the *Capital Times* investigation, was because they feared retribution. Frankly, I am appalled that there is an environment at King where people fear retribution for simply being concerned about the well-being of a member under their care or their loved one.

Not only must we make sure the members' quality of life at this facility is the best that it can be, we must ensure that members and their families have necessary avenues to express their concerns. When concerns are raised, we want to make sure those are appropriately investigated without the fear of retribution. As was explained at the public hearing on the audit proposal, the state has a Long Term Care Ombudsman Program, which allows residents of long-term care facilities to voice concerns to an outside, independent party. We need to make sure people know about this program and are comfortable using it.

I have also heard from people who have told me about the excellent care their family members have received at King. I am glad to hear that many people are satisfied with the care they or their loved ones are receiving. I am confident that the Legislative Audit Bureau will talk with members and families who are satisfied as well as those who have concerns.

The Wisconsin Veterans Home at King has incredible staff members who work every day to take care of our veterans. We must make sure that they are provided with appropriate training to address the current needs of their members. As the resident population has changed, there are more acute medical, mental health and behavior care needs including patients with post-traumatic stress disorder and more patients with dementia. It is our responsibility to ensure that staff have the necessary training to handle these changes in member needs. The audit will evaluate staffing levels and provide guidance on what we can do to ensure King retains high quality employees.

The Wisconsin State Legislature has directed the funding of millions of dollars to pay for nursing home staff at King including for therapy assistants, respiratory therapists, direct care staff, pharmacy staff, and clinical social worker positions, and other employees. We've allocated resources to cover overtime costs, like for working nights and weekends, additional services for King's residents like additional mental health services, and programs that aid in staff training. We also passed a bill to amend the 2013-15 Authorized State Building Program to allow for the construction of the John R. Moses Skilled Nursing Facility at the Wisconsin Veterans Home at King, which will be a state of the art facility for members with dementia.

We made these bipartisan investments because we want the best for everyone at this facility. But I think our veterans deserve that we ask the questions: Have we taken the right steps to ensure the quality of life at King is the best that it can be? What do we need to do to address quality of care concerns?

The audit will help answer these questions and help appropriately guide our budgetary decisions. Our veterans have earned our gratitude and respect for their service, and I want to make sure that

we are investing wisely in programs that will make an impact on all of those who work and live at the Wisconsin Veterans Home at King. Our veterans come to facilities, like King, for the best care possible and for comradery with other veterans who understand what they have gone through in their lives. Under no circumstances should our veterans at King feel like they've been forgotten, isolated, or poorly treated. If there are problems at King, we must shine a light on them and figure out how to resolve them in a manner benefiting our veterans that demonstrates our utmost respect and gratitude for their selfless service to our great country.

Now that the Joint Legislative Audit Committee has approved the audit, the Legislative Audit Bureau will begin their work. While the audit may take many months to complete, I am hopeful that it will give us the answers we are looking for. The Legislative Audit Bureau has a toll-free hotline so people can offer their comments on audits, or on potential waste, fraud or abuse in state government. If you have a comment you would like considered for this audit, please call 1-877-372-8317. Calls can be made anonymously.

If you have any questions about any of the information I have included or if you have suggestions on other topics or issues you would like learn more about, you may call my office toll-free at (800) 991-5541; write me at P.O. Box 7882, Madison, WI 53707; or e-mail me at: Sen.Olsen@legis.state.wi.us. You can also sign up for our newsletter at our website: <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/senate/sen14/news/index.htm>.

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